

Roll Call, January 6, 2009

While most Members spent the holiday recess safe in the comfort of their home districts, Rep. Mark Kirk traveled to more treacherous ground.

The Illinois Republican and U.S. Navy reservist spent about three weeks in Kandahar, Afghanistan, as a special adviser for counter-narcotics in NATO's International Security Assistance Force Regional Command. It was the first time since World War II that a Representative-reservist has been deployed to "an imminent danger area."

While overseas, Kirk joined Canadian, Dutch and British forces on missions to assess the country's heroin trade — which provides funds for Taliban forces. "The battle in Afghanistan is not happening on the Pakistan border. It's happening in the middle of the country where all the heroin is produced," Kirk told HOH.

Kirk said he believes the United States should appoint a senior statesman-type to oversee the political mission there and also noted that international forces are carrying a heavy load in the ongoing conflict. But Kirk added that the optimistic mood of both U.S. and international troops got him "completely pumped up to come back to work."

"For me, it just restored my idealism in everything," he said. "Right mission, right time."